The Sham Election

Nikki Craft to Bare In Mind, December 14, 1988

Compiled by Claude (Anthropic) in collaboration with Nikki Craft. Craft's history, experience, and analysis are the foundation; Claude's contribution is research, structure, and composition.

Written one month after John Kyff's "Craft Wins — Nudists Lose" and before Craft had seen Kyff or Baxandall answer for it publicly, this letter does two things at once: it corrects the record on the Cape Cod withdrawal directly, and it names something that had, until this letter, gone unreported in the nudist/naturist press — the forced removal of Michelle Handler, Craft's N.O.P.E. co-founder, from the Naturist Leadership Council on a 6–5 vote, after she circulated an unpublished letter, not submitted for publication, to perhaps as many as 200 naturist leaders criticizing Baxandall's use of a sexualized image of an eighteen-year-old woman.

> *Is it only a woman who must ask permission in this 'lifestyle' before she speaks her mind?*

That question is the letter's center. Craft documents that three readers had already protested Kyff's piece before her own letter ran, and that their protests were held back by the editors until this same issue; that Tom Kelley had already published a "peace and harmony" editorial the month before without contacting her; and that Kyff's attack went out, in her words, "before he or Baxandall had even read our statement."

The document

Bare In Mind
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Dear Editor:

If the editors of Bare In Mind, The Event, Clothed With the Sun* and other naturist/nudist newsletters did not wonder if Kyff's vitriolic, negative diatribe, "Craft Wins. Nudists Lose" is litigious then at least a few readers must have. I certainly did.

Several readers, including Marianna Hoppe-Handler, Carl Flick, and Nina Silver did wonder, and wrote to Bare In Mind asking why they published such irresponsible journalism without requesting the other side. These letters of protest were held, at the editors discretion, until this issue. Instead, the last issue included a nice, well-meaning editorial by Tom Kelly calling for peace and harmony. The plea for "communication and sensitivity" came about one month too late if you ask me. But then, no one, not one nudist/naturist editor bothered to ask me or the other Cape Cod plaintiffs where our withdrawal statement was.

When Kyff's vituperation hit nudist/naturist mailboxes across the country in Bare In Mind the Cape Cod plaintiffs were still holding our collective statement until Lee Baxandall had a chance to review it. We had assured him, by telephone, that as soon as the plaintiffs reached a consensus on the wording he would have that opportunity before it was released to the public. We were doing this in order to avoid any possible misunderstandings or inaccuracies. Look where that attempt at fairness got us. Kyff's missive was written before he or Baxandall had even read our statement!

Kyff's editorial was propelled by scorn (hell hath no fury like a rabid First Amendment fundamentalist who thinks someone's gonna take his pictures away) and a bunch of third hand information. He recklessly failed to speak to the plaintiffs, our attorney or me before hurling the absurd claim that "Ms Craft now says the government's anti-nudity regulation affecting the Cape Cod National Seashore...is necessary in order to protect women on the beach from aggressive men."

For years I've advocated a clothing-optional ethic, while challenging and encouraging others to challenge that regulation. I've worked too hard for this "lifestyle", naturist values and the people in it to be subjected to such a gross misrepresentation of my position.

Most readers of the nudist/naturist press have not forgotten that in Spring, 1988, when the Naturist Leadership Council (NLC) was purging itself of dissidents and applying its new, more conservative face as the NNLC, Michelle Handler was forceably removed as director* for less than this. Even if one did not agree with what Handler wrote, it definitely was not libelous. Kyff's libelous harangue was written in his official capacity as legal coordinator representing the Nudist/Naturist "Leadership" Council. What does the NNLC have to say about this embarrassment coming from their legal coordinator?

Just what did Michelle Handler do to get outsted from the NLC? A quick overview reminds us that she wrote a letter that was critical of Baxandall for publishing exploitative images of women, including a color centerspread that displayed eleven snapshots of an eighteen-year-old woman with a pubic mohawk coyly playing to the camera. Handler stated in the letter that the centerspread was exploitation, not necessarily pornography mind you, but a betrayal of naturist women and feminist values. Handler stated clearly she was not representing the NLC. Even so, many did not "approve of her methods." She had, after all, sent her letter to perhaps as many as 200 naturist leaders without talking to Lee Baxandall first.

Is it only a woman who must ask permission in this "lifestyle" before she speaks her mind? Bern Loibl, editor of The Event, sent Nina Silver's editorial column entitled, "Why Aren't There More Women In The Naturist Movement?" to Baxandall for comments before it went to press. Yet, in every issue of CwS Baxandall publishes what ever he damn well wants to without conferring with anybody. Kyff's editorial "Nudists Lose" went out to thousands, in numerous publications, without one editor requesting my opinion. That is abominable.

Kyff's hysterics (most likely directed by Baxandall) accomplished several things. It aimed much undeserved outrage and hostility towards the plaintiffs in the Cape Cod case, me in particular, attempting to ruin my reputation while diverting productive discussion away from the actual reasons the case has ended. If anyone really wants to know why we left the case they need to go directly to the source rather than following Kyff and Baxandall's diversionary path.

Here, then, is the statement of the Cape Cod plaintiffs. John Kyff and Lee Baxandall are being given the opportunity to give their reply in this issue. How nice. Next month I will submit my response to Kyff, Baxandall and others. Until then, ponder the hypocrisy, double standards and sexism revealed in these recent events. Understanding these inequities is crucial. It just may help you answer that most often asked naturist question: "Why aren't there more girls in the naturist lifestyle?"

Sincerely,

Nikki Craft

Footnote: A six to five vote removed Michelle. What has not been reported in the naturist press is that three groups who supported Handler refused to caste a vote in protest of the sham election that John Kyff and Lee Baxandall instigated in order to get rid of her. NOPE resigned from the NLC due to the way Michelle was treated and NENA has all but fallen apart as an organization due to the split that occurred.

Transcription note: Original spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and typographical errors have been preserved.

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